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RUEHDM/AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS 1472
RUEHSF/AMEMBASSY SOFIA 0962
RUEHSI/AMEMBASSY TBILISI 2948
RUEHVI/AMEMBASSY VIENNA 1481
RUEHYE/AMEMBASSY YEREVAN 1168
RUEHKU/AMEMBASSY KUWAIT 0790
RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 0560
RUEHMK/AMEMBASSY MANAMA 0146
RUEHMO/AMEMBASSY MOSCOW 5308
RUEHKV/AMEMBASSY KIEV 0661
RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 6858
RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NICOSIA 6526
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 6453
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHVK/AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK 0065
RUEHDA/AMCONSUL ADANA 0271
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 9569
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RHMFISS/CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
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RHMFIUU/39ABG INCIRLIK AB TU
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TAGS: [TBIO](#) [AMED](#) [EAID](#) [CASC](#) [SENV](#) [EAGR](#) [KPAO](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: TURKISH AGRICULTURE MINISTER ON AVIAN FLU

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¶1. Summary. Turkish Minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs Eker, in a meeting with Ambassador January 13, reported on the progress made in responding to the recent outbreak of Avian Influenza in Turkey and agreed to a proposed US assessment team visit the week of January 16. He appealed for US contributions toward a World Bank-recommended package of measures designed to improve Turkey's capacities to deal with AI. Eker emphasized that the AI outbreaks here are along migratory bird flyways that cross the eastern, central and southern parts of the country and that the spread of the disease in poultry is not related to trade in birds. The Minister noted that children in rural areas are particularly at risk. Additional measures need to

be taken to educate rural families about the risks associated with this disease. Eker claimed the ministry has received informal reports of AI outbreaks in Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iran, Iraq and Syria, including the culling of 50,000 birds in Iran, but he offered no specific evidence. End Summary.

Current Situation

¶2. Eker said the ministry has confirmed 19 incidents of AI in 13 provinces; 31 further incidents are suspected in an additional 18 provinces, meaning that AI is confirmed or suspected in over one-third of Turkey's 81 provinces. The minister underscored the fact that a single case of AI might only be one bird or one backyard farm. A total of 455,000 birds have been culled as of January 12. Eker declined to predict the number of birds that may eventually require culling, but noted that backyard, domesticated family poultry totals an estimated 10 million birds (with 300 million total in Turkey, including those at commercial operations). Three kilometer quarantine areas have been established around each suspected site, and all birds are being culled within the quarantine areas. In addition, there is a ten kilometer surveillance zone in which all transport is being disinfected and all trade in poultry and poultry products forbidden. Provincial governors are using local police and Gendarme to enforce the quarantines.

A Brief History of AI in Turkey

¶3. Eker provided an overview of Turkey's response to the October and December AI outbreaks in Turkey and described

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the initiatives the government put in place to detect and eradicate any incidents of AI. Prior to the October outbreak and after receiving reports of AI in wild birds in Russia, the government, in conjunction with the European Union, conducted an AI crisis management exercise. Eker said the authorities took very proactive and aggressive measures in October and again in mid-December as information about further AI outbreaks first appeared. In October after the first outbreak, the GOT began taking samples, particularly in lakes where migratory birds were present. Over 400 samples of birds and manure were taken as part of detection procedures. Letters were sent to provincial offices outlining the precautions that needed to be taken for poultry, particularly on small land holdings.

Migratory Birds Cause of Spread

¶4. The Minister provided evidence that the spread of the disease in December and January were due primarily to migratory birds and not from the sale of infected poultry. He cited several incidents of AI infected dead wild birds in different areas of the country including Bitlis, Erzincan, Beypazari (near Ankara) and Aydin. He had maps showing known migratory flyways through Turkey and each AI incident. In all cases the outbreaks of AI were along migratory routes.

Minister: "Commercial Farms Not a Problem"

¶5. Eker said the December/January outbreaks of AI in are taking place in mostly remote, rural areas among small household flocks of small numbers of birds (2-5) kept for family use and not significantly traded. A visit to any rural town will show domestic poultry running freely in yards and along roadsides. Given their remote and dispersed nature, these family flocks are not sources for spreading AI more widely among poultry, but also mean that precautionary measures are difficult. The Minister took pains to

emphasize that integrated commercial poultry operations are not at risk and that meat from these operations is safe.
(Note: We have observed that the commercial sector has been very active in protecting facilities and educating local farmers. Many companies are providing training and initiating their own surveillance of farms near commercial operations. However, despite these actions, poultry

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consumption has decreased by 90 percent in recent weeks and according to one private sector representative, the industry is losing \$40 million a month due to the crisis. End note.)

Children Particularly at Risk

¶6. The Minister noted that government needs to be more active in protecting children who are particularly at risk to contracting the disease. Children often have close contact with their family flocks. Eker had met with the Dogubayazit family whose children died from AI in early January. The oldest child had slaughtered sick birds and the two middle children plucked them. By contrast, the youngest child who had only more casual contact recovered, and the parents had not become ill at all. Recently the GOT had sent home information about the disease attached to report cards given to the children.

Further Steps

¶7. The Minister stressed that he believes the government is taking effective actions and being fully transparent with the public and the international community. He underscored the need for the government to take additional steps to help educate people and address the economic impact of the crisis. On January 14, a deputy prime minister will meet with government and private sector officials in all related fields to discuss the crisis and ways to address it. (Note: The Turkish press is reporting that the meeting will actually be chaired by Prime Minister Erdogan. End note.)

¶8. Eker claimed the ministry had received informal reports among all of Turkey's neighbors to the south and east. He said Iran has reportedly culled some 50,000 birds, and another country has worked to vaccinate poultry. When pressed, however, he did not provide any evidence of AI in these countries.

Request for US Help

¶9. Eker and his deputy referred to an assessment and proposed package of measures developed in late 2005 as part of a World Bank initiative that he said was supported by AID. The package identified needed improvements in

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laboratory capabilities, diagnostics, training and equipment for veterinarians, safety clothing and gear for those culling birds, and compensation for peasant farmers. Turkey expected some help will come to support this work via World Bank loans and from bilateral donors, and Eker urged that the US consider supporting this effort as soon as possible, preferably ahead of World Bank loan approval. (Note: Separately, the Turkish press reported January 13 that the EU is redirecting 4 million Euros for Turkey's AI efforts from already planned EU assistance for Turkey. End note.)

¶10. Eker also noted that he will be in Beijing for the AI conference that begins January 17. He expressed interest in meeting with Ambassador Powell. A ministry staffer asked for help in changing Eker's speaking slot at the conference; embassy suggested the Turkish embassy in Beijing may be

better placed to influence the AI conference program.

U.S. Support

¶11. The Ambassador thanked Eker for the information and commended him and the government for their work in responding to the crisis. He underscored the concern and sympathy in the United States for the situation in Turkey. Ambassador informed Eker that two CDC experts will arrive shortly to assist with WHO and FAO work, and he said that an interagency USG assessment team plans to visit Turkey and possibly the Caucasus beginning o/a January 16 to assess the situation, determine where there may be gaps and lessons to be learned, and consider the issue of further USG support. Any consideration of the World Bank project would flow from that visit, he said. Eker expressed appreciation for the assessment team and directed his staff to work with the embassy on arrangements for it.

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